

## JOHN BUNCLE'S PANEGYRIC ON THE SPANISH FLY

BY HARRY B. WEISS

NEW BRUNSWICK, N. J.

Every time I read the "Life and Opinions of John Bunce, Esquire" by Thomas Amory, I find some diverting account which I had overlooked previously. Mention has been made of Bunce's narrative of the battle between a flea and a louse\* and his remarks on the "Spanish fly" and its vesicating properties are equally as amusing and furnish some evidence concerning the state of thought in 1756. Undoubtedly some present day writings will be equally as entertaining after the passage of a hundred or two hundred years.

Although the mathematical, medical, biological and other discussions in which the book abounds probably served no better purpose than to display the pansophism of the author, Thomas Amory, yet such opinions must have been current to some extent when the book was written, even though seldom expressed in such grandiose language. Speaking of a visit on July 2, 1734, to one Dr. Stanvil, Mr. Bunce proceeds pompously as follows:

"As he had an Essay on Fevers in his hand, when I entered the room, I requested to know how he accounted for the effects of Cantharides, in raising and strengthening a low trembling pulse, and driving the natural heat and efflatus of the blood outward, in giving relief in delirious ravings, stupors, and loss of reason, in reducing continual fevers to distinct remissions, and in cleansing and opening the obstructed glands and lymphatics, so as to bring on the critical sweats, let loose the saliva and glandular secretions, and bring down the thick soruble urine? How does blistering, so happily brought in by the physical bully of this age, Dr. Radcliffe, so wonderfly cool and dilute the blood? It seems to me somewhat strange.

\* Journal of the New York Entomological Society, vol. xxxiii, pp. 114-115.

“It is easily accounted for,” replied Dr. Stanvil. “The Spanish fly, an extremely hot and perfectly caustic insect, is stocked with a subtile, active, and extremely pungent salt, which enters the blood upon the application of the blister, and passes with it through the several glandular strainers and secretory ducts. This stimulating force of the fly’s salt, occasions the pain felt in making the water with a blister, which may be taken off by a thin emulsion made with the pulp of roasted apples in milk and water, and causes the liberal, foul, and stinking sweats, while the Epispassic is on.

“This being evident, it is plain from thence, that the penetrating salts of the fly, that is, the volatile pungent parts of the cantharides, act in the blood by dissolving, attenuating, and rarifying the viscid cohesions of the lymph and serum; by stimulating the nervous coats of the vessels, throw off their stagnating viscidities, and by cleansing the glands, and forcing out the coagulated serum, restore the circulation and freedom of lymph from the arteries to the veins; opening, scouring and cleansing at the same time, the expurgatory glands.

“In short, as common cathartics purge the guts, and cleanse and throw off their clammy, stagnating, and obstructing contents, by rarifying and dissolving the viscid cohesions of the fluids, and by stimulating the solids; so do the active salts of the fly penetrate the whole animal machine, become a glandular lymphatic purge, and perform the same thing in all the small straining conveying pipes, that common purgatives effect in the intestines: and as by this means, all the sluices and outlets of the glandular secretions are opened, the cantharides must be cooling, diluting, and refrigerating in their effects to the greatest degree, though so very hot, caustic, and pungent in themselves. So wonderfully has the great Creator provided for his creature, man; in giving him not only a variety of the most pleasing food, but so fine a medicine, among a thousand others, as the Spanish fly, to save him from the destroying fever, and restore him to health again. It is not by a discharge of serum, as too many doctors imagine, that a blister relieves, for five times the quantity

may be brought off by bleeding, vomiting, or purging; but the benefit is entirely owing to that heating, attenuating, and pungent salt of this fly, and this fly only, which the divine power and goodness has made a lymphatic purgative, or glandular cathartic for the relief of man, in this fatal and tormenting malady. Vast is our obligation to God for all his providential blessings. Great are the wonders that he doth for the children of men."